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ABSTRACT

Literacy is both special and individual, and literacy programs should provide for both needs and interests of all students. Some students learn to read through phonological skills. Some are influenced greatly by their parents and their interest in literature. Of the 30 people interviewed in a random survey of students and personnel in a university setting, 21 credited their parents with introducing them to the joys and pleasures of reading. As children move from the primary grades to the middle grades and beyond, they are confronted with more and more content material and this presents a difficulty for some. Five articles selected by M. P. Monson and R. J. Monson in the April 1994 issue of "The Reading Teacher" provide focused portraits in content areas. The articles raise the possibility of using physical objects, graphics, semantic maps, continuums, timelines, Venn diagrams, H-maps, story maps, and/or flowcharts to help students learn. Computers are also a means of learning but then some ask, is it best for a family to get so much of what software developers call "edutainment" (a combination of entertainment and education) at home rather than outside it. Most children and older students are gregarious and enjoy working with each other and their instructors. Literacy is reaching far and wide, in the homes, the schools, business, even prisons. Even adults need to learn. (Includes four figures; contains 10 references.) (TB)

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Susan Partridge 1994

Literacy Discussed: Special or Individual? Literacy Interests or Literacy Needs?

ED 373 320

Is literacy special or individual? Literacy interests or literacy needs -- should one take precedence over the other when literacy programs are being planned?

The number of titles found under Literacy in reputable educational references seems to indicate that literacy is both special and individual, as are literacy interests and literacy needs. This paper is addressed to the belief that this indication is correct.

In the June 1994 supplement to the Education Index, the following titles appeared:

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In the 1994 catalog of the International Reading Association, additional titles can be found:

Innovations in Literacy for a Diverse Society
Children of Promise: Literate Activity in Linguistically and Culturally Diverse Classrooms
Resources in Early Literacy Development: An Annotated Bibliography
Encouraging Your Junior High Student to Read
You Can Encourage Your High School Students to Read

In the June 1994 issue of NCAL Connections, National Center

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on Adult Literacy, University of Pennsylvania, articles concerned with "Prison Literacy" and "Workplace Literacy" can be found.

It is encouraging to note that educators are deeply interested in promoting literacy in all conceivable ways and that among the determinants, as to adequate literacy programs for all, are individual interests, individual needs, individual goals, age, gender, and mental and physical health.

A young man or woman interested in making agriculture his/her life's work needs much greater proficiency in agricultural literacy than those who are pursuing different careers. However, being somewhat literate in many areas makes a person a better listener, a better questioner and more socially acceptable than one who seems bored and contributes nothing to any discussion other than those pertaining strictly to his/her interests.

Obviously, age is a concern in designing literacy programs. It is believed that the very young children have so much to gain from nursery rhymes, fables, fairy stories, little ditties, poems -- and should not be denied them, as they provide pleasure, academic skills, values, emotional outlets, parental involvement and, what could be, a life-saving warning as indicated in the following example:

It was often observed that little children, when swimming, would make believe they were drowning. Actually, they were "crying wolf" (Aesop's fable, "The Boy Who Cried Wolf"), unaware that their "fun" could end in a disaster.

A few of numerous examples of the many values of literature are remembered though many decades have passed.

A little preschooler asked his mother, night after night, to read him the story about Bow-Wow and Mew-Mew, a dog and cat who, unlike many dogs and cats, loved each other very much. Tears streamed down the little fellow's face as his mother read, but he insisted upon hearing it again and again. Apparently, he was deeply moved by the love between a cat and a dog.

A lit[illegible] ditty which young children always seemed to enjoy helped them to learn to count forward, "One little, two little, three little Indians," etc., and it also helped them in counting backward -- "Ten little, nine little, eight little Indians", etc.

Bryant, MacLean, Bradley and Crossland's (2) longitudinal study which monitored the phonological awareness and progress of 65 children aged 4:7 to 6:7, produced strong support for the following two views:

> That sensitivity to rhyme leads to awareness of phonemes, which in turn affects reading.
> That rhyme makes a direct contribution to reading that is independent of the connection between reading and phoneme awareness.

They concluded:

> Our study confirms the existence of a strong relation between children's phonological skills and reading. It also shows that rhyme and alliteration are precursors of phoneme detection, which, in turn plays a considerable role in learning to read. Sensitivity to rhyme also makes a direct contribution to reading, probably by helping children to group words with common

spelling patterns. The study demonstrates the importance of early rhyming skills.

Parents can, and some do, contribute a great deal to children's love of reading and their acquisition of reading skill. Bryant et al. (1) lend support to Trevarthen's work which suggests that mothers' speech to their babies may play an important part (Trevarthen and Marwick [1986]). This work also suggests that the prosodic cues and rhythm in mothers' speech to their babies may play an important part. The work also suggests that nursery rhymes are an ingredient of mother-infant "dialogues" and thus are a part of intersubjective routines which may play a significant role in language acquisition.

A small study by this writer showed the importance of parents' part in instilling in their children a love of reading.

A random selection of thirty people connected with a university in capacities ranging from student to personnel, and in age from twelve (Talent Identification Program) to fifty was made. Each was asked, "Do you enjoy reading beyond what is required of you? Whom do you credit with instilling (or failing to instill) in you the love of reading?"

Twenty-nine of the thirty reported that they do read beyond what is required of them. Twenty-one credited their parents with introducing them to the joys and benefits of reading; two, their grandparents; four, themselves; two, a combination of home and school; and only one, the school.

A couple of examples, interesting, if not unique, are

offered below:

One young woman reported that, as her mother played Walt Disney tunes on the piano, she turned the pages for her mother, and before long she was able to read and enjoy the words.

One adult reported that to this day she can recall reading with her mother about Jackie Rabbit who didn't want to take a bath.

A young girl who gave herself credit for her reading ability and enjoyment of reading, remembered reading with her mother a story about a little girl who was looking all over for her shoes.

Throughout many decades, it was noted that there were always books with strong appeal to many children. The popularity of Dr. Seuss' books is remembered as an example.

Today, illustrators and writers are contributing their versions of some of the old favorites that have stood the test of time. Children's librarians in the public libraries can help parents and children select those of interest to them. A couple of examples are offered:

<u>The Three Little Wolves and the Big, Bad Pig</u>
by Eugene Trivizas

<u>The True Story of the Three Little Pigs</u>
by Jon Scieszka

In this story, the wolf is telling his version.

These newer editions could provide for parents' and children's mutual enjoyment. The parents could share the old

version with the child, and the child could share the newer version with the parents.

There seems to be no end as to what literature can do for people from the cradle to the grave. The following is an example that is thought to be rather unusual:

Some young children have trouble with left-right orientation. The following rhyme, by Mary Ann Hoberman (4) might contribute to their learning to do so:

Windshield wipers wipe the windshield
Wipe the water from the pane
This way That way
This way That way
This way That way
In the rain.

The illustration accompanying the rhyme would appeal to many children, as a dog with long ears and big eyes is the driver of the car with its windshield wipers working.

As children move from the primary grades to the middle grades and beyond, they are confronted with more and more content material, and this presents a problem to some. In the April 1994 issue of The Reading Teacher, the guest editors, Michele Pahl Monson and Robert J. Monson (7) write:

> We have come to understand our world by dividing knowledge into content area disciplines. Literacy -- reading, writing, listening and speaking -- has been a means by which children access and express their understanding of content. As we approach a new millennium, we find ourselves in societies that require multiple ways of understanding and a variety of

> strategies for processing information. Will our definition of literacy be augmented to include a range of symbol systems that will enable learners to ask questions, integrate knowledge, and solve problems? Will our historical definition of the content areas need to be examined as we strive to build connections among learning, curriculum, and the eventual role that today's children will play in a more global society?

The guest editors selected five articles from a diverse group of authors "to provide focused portraits of literacy in the content areas." Three of the selected articles "highlight the work of practitioners in elementary education and in higher education." Each of the five articles provides much "food for thought" for teachers in bringing their content area teaching in keeping with the pace of technological advances and the increasingly diverse school population.

It is generally known that students need help with concepts found in content area texts, but this is especially true of second language learners, as the gap between their communication skills and their ability to function adequately in the content area presents a problem.

Overlapping of ideas in the articles is apparent: student writing, providing for students for whom English is a second language, using scaffolding strategies as a means of engaging children with content material, and using many materials, objects, etc. beyond the text in order to help students to become more curious, more interested, and thus understand the text content much better.

Each article has been written with care and is felt worth

reading. An example follows:

Nancy L. Hadaway and Terrell A. Young (3) offer several suggestions for making instructional decisions for the development of literacy via content. They believe that "numerous techniques furnish opportunities to organize concepts graphically and build background knowledge into a format that aids comprehension. Concept and semantic maps, continuums and timelines, Venn diagrams, H-maps, story maps, flowcharts, graphs, and charts are offered.

In addition to the graphics, they offer several visual examples: maps, realia (actual objects). Not only do they explain each in considerable detail but, in addition, offer various diagrams. A few follow:

A Venn Diagram

Figure 1
Venn diagram

Greece and Rome
Greeks
• Inventive
• More direct legal system where those disagreeing argued before a group acting as a jury
• Large professional army
Greek influence on Rome
• Similar architecture
• Both worshipped gods (Romans gave Roman names to Greek gods)
• Similarities in statues and paintings
• Roman writers often imitated Greek writings
Romans
• Practical
• Legal system with courts, judges, and lawyers
• Small armies of citizen soldiers

"Using circles, Venn diagrams help students view independent and interrelated aspects of concepts. For postreading, students can map distinct and overlapping areas, as in the Figure 1 social studies lesson on Greece and Rome from A Message of Ancient Days. As a concluding exercise, the diagram can be used as an aid to writing about the similarities and differences of the concepts being studied."

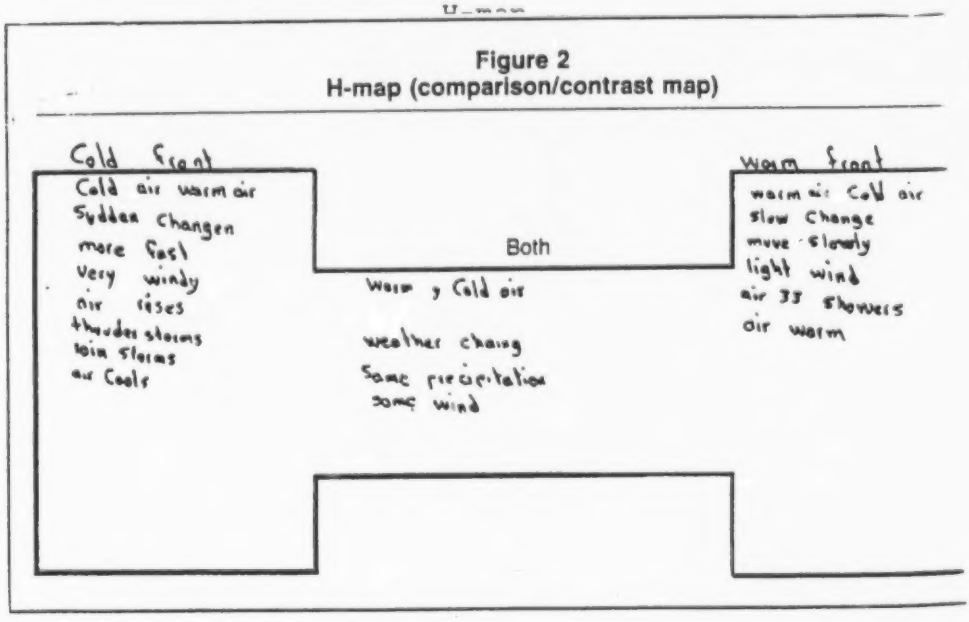

Figure 2
H-map (comparison/contrast map)

"H-maps (comparison/contrast maps). Like Venn diagrams, H-maps (Devine, 1989) serve as a comparison and contrast tool. Each side of the map provides space to detail differences between concepts, with the middle section used to denote commonalities. Teachers may use H-maps as a notetaking format for, during, or after reading. Or H-maps can be utilized as a prewriting activity for a comparison/contrast paper. Figure 2 reflects a science lesson on weather where second language learners highlighted what was the same and what was different about warm and cold fronts."

Figure 3
Jot chart for "Plants Without Seeds"

	Algae	Mosses and liverworts	Ferns
Where do they grow?	1. wet place (ponds, oceans, and streams) 2. rocks 3. fur	1. Mosses grow close together in damp places. 2. Liverworts often live on rocks in shallow streams.	Ferns live in drier places than other nonseed plants.
What size are they?	small to large	small	small to large
How are they used?	They are used as food for small living creatures.	They are used for food for animals.	Many fuels that heat homes were formed from fernlike plants.

"A jot chart (Vacca and Vacca, 1989) helps students take notes on reading or organize to write. In the matrix provided, students record characteristics of new concepts for a science lesson, such as 'Plants Without Seeds' from Science Horizons (Figure 3). This chart can be used to summarize the chapter or as a study aid."

Figure 4
Card sort for "Biomes"

Biomes	cold	snowy	hot
temperate	grassland	many plants	little rainfall
uneven precipitation	conifers	tundra	little precipitation
forest layers*	grasses	many insects	taiga
desert	little change in seasons	many animals and plants	little rainfall
permafrost	deciduous forest	hot days cold nights	grasses mosses lichens
plants store water	cold winters warm summers	humid	tropical rain forest

*used more than once

"In the card sort (Whilser and Williams, 1990), a variation of the word sort, teachers select the important terms and concepts and randomly arrange them on a sheet. Students form an overview of the material in hierarchical fashion, cutting the terms from the provided handout, arranging them from general to specific, and finally gluing the cards down.

It was noted throughout decades that dedicated teachers used many of the things beyond the text that are now recommended for increasing ALL students' interest, arousing their curiosity and increasing their understanding. There was communication between

the teachers and the students. They made it their business to get to know each student's interest, limitations, strengths, etc. A well-remembered example of the importance of a teacher's knowing each student is offered.

J.S. was an upstanding and respectful young man. In a conversation to a friend one day, he said, "I'm not disinterested in the history of our country, but right now, I'd like to hear more about the Vietnam War because I'll be drafted very soon." He was drafted and served well. Had J.S. been in the classroom of a teacher who veered from the text to satisfy students' needs and interests, this would have been taken care of, as the teacher, undoubtedly, would have brought in many newspaper clippings and appropriate objects and would have alerted his students to related T.V. programs coming up, and would have engaged them in a lively discussion about each. Surely the venting of the feelings of his/her students at or near the draft age would have been a relief to the students. A student who was fearful would soon learn that he/she wasn't alone in this regard.

It is generally known that elementary schools' language arts programs have been dominated by commercial basals. Now, there are those educators who feel that a literature-based elementary language arts curriculum offers significant advantages to both better and poorer readers. So strongly do they feel about this that they fear "that unless the role of literature is properly articulated, the current interest in it will eventually pass, to be replaced by something else."

There is considerable evidence to support the belief that children who, from infancy have enjoyed hearing their parents reading them pieces of literature, are more interested in reading than those who have not had this experience.

S.A. Valmsky (9) who does research and works with schools to improve their language arts programs, offers his thoughts and findings in an article, "Reflections on the State of Elementary Literature Instruction."

A call-out near the end of the article seems to offer educators something to think about. It follows:

> Meaningful experiences with literature may help develop the strategies typically taught in reading programs, but they also teach children strategies for processing literary texts that traditional reading programs do not specifically teach.

The wonders of the computer continue to amaze us, as it has "found itself" almost everywhere and still seems to be looking for additional places.

Michael Meyer (6), in an article, "Culture Club" writes beneath the title: "Microsoft: The company that Bill Gates built continues to overwhelm its competition. But will it have to re-invent itself to stay on top?" He then goes on to explain:

> The problem is Money, the company's personal-finance software. Gates hopes it will help lure millions of people into Microsoft's lane of Information Highway: home banking, home shopping, entertainment and electronic mail.

> Microsoft's market is changing. Software is not just bits and bytes anymore, not the operating systems and utilitarian spreadsheets that have buoyed Microsoft for so long. The future increasingly is Hollywood "entertainment," home videos, home everything. To fend off onrushing new competitors and create the products demanded by the new market, Microsoft itself must change.

Barbara Kantrowitz's (5) article, "Home Is Where The Money Is" and the subtitle, "Software: A Good Start for Microsoft" seem to offer some encouraging words for the Company. A question comes to mind: Is it best for a family to get so much of what software developers call edutainment, a combination of education and entertainment at home rather than seeking these benefits outside the home? Most children are gregarious and enjoy mingling with their peers.

A small random sampling of young college students revealed that they, too, are interested in their peers -- how they think and why, and they enjoy seeing their smiles, their frowns, the raising of eyebrows during a discussion. Results of the sampling showed that they favored being taught by an instructor rather than the computer.

It is, indeed, encouraging to note that efforts to promote literacy are reaching far and wide -- in the homes, the schools, businesses -- even in the prisons. Newman, A., Lewis, W. and Beverstock, C. (8) write:

> Illiteracy in American prisons is as high as 75%, about three times higher than the illiteracy level of the general population. They offer some insights on

the problem.

It is generally conceded that adults of today need higher levels of literacy if they are to find employment, function effectively in society and keep up with changes in the workplace, yet there have been official reports that there are millions of adults who have difficulty with ordinary literacy tasks, and reports that suggest that the low literacy in America is due to poor quality schooling and increased immigration into the United States.

In an article, "Why Johnny's Parents Can't Read", Daniel A. Wagner (10), Director, NCAL, offers several actions he thinks are needed to improve adult literacy. This is indeed encouraging to those trying to improve it. It is felt, however, that each suggestion needs to be thought through in terms of ALL adults concerned. One of Wagner's felt needs follows: "We need new options, such as the uses of technology as reported last July in a report by the U.S. Congress Office of Technology Assessment (see cover story)."

This need is not denied but, believing strongly in the uniqueness of each individual, some questions come to mind: Is technology for all students? Is it for all teachers? Can adequate training in its use be provided for teachers? Is available software adequate and appropriate?

Decades of experiences have been convincing in the fact that the uniqueness of each student, from the child to the adult,

should be the guiding force in designing a program for him or her. Witness has been borne again and again to success in teaching students of all ages, each with a pronounced difficulty in learning to read, achieve success when this approach has been taken. As a matter of fact, many became adults who can read, who do read, who enjoy doing so and, consequently, are enjoying a richer and fuller life.

Newman et al. offer implications for literacy programs in prisons and for their assessment.

> A direct relationship exists between insufficient literacy and unsocial, often criminal behavior. Education is a proven catalyst for change, and a majority of studies report a correlation between greater education and lower recidivism (instruction is particularly successful with juvenile inmates). How the offender thinks is associated with his rehabilitation. Consequently, programs that use cognitive training were found to be most effective in reducing recidivism because they encouraged critical thinking on the larger issues of literacy, self, life, and society.

The authors remind us of the benefits to our country from the earning power of those prisoners who go on to become responsible taxpaying citizens.

Hopefully, the widespread efforts to promote literacy will result in many more productive and happier citizens, much less crime and, therefore, greater safety for all citizens and a great reduction in government spending.

Efforts to promote literacy can continue to expand with the

appropriate use of technology. The August/September 1994 issue of Reading Today, an International Reading Association publication, gave a front-page announcement of a video teleconference that will spotlight literacy issues on the upcoming International Literacy Day. A few pertinent points follow:

> Literacy is a worldwide issue, and people from all over the world have experiences and ideas to share regarding outreach and ways to improve instructional practice. Rarely, however, is there a forum for an international exchange of ideas.
>
> On September 8, 1994, International Literacy Day, the International Reading Association will join with UNESCO and Sprint Telecommunications to offer such a forum through a two-hour video teleconference focusing on key literacy issues. This video teleconference will be uplinked from Washington, D.C. and Paris.

Another enlightening report, found in the June/July 1994 issue of Reading Today, an International Reading Association publication, concerned a speech given by Tom Snyder at the Media Awards Luncheon during the 1994 IRA Annual Convention. A few of the reported points made by Snyder, founder of an educational software company, and also a former teacher, are offered:

He said that technology will undoubtedly become part of school life, but he presented reasons for skepticism in order to keep people from being "goofy" about it.

First, progressive teaching concepts devalued the teacher, Snyder said, giving rise to teachers who claim they do not teach; they create "environments for learning."

Computers in education, Snyder stated, tend to diminish the teacher's role in the same way -- they have revitalized what he called student-centered, "teacher-out-of-the-loop" teaching. Interactive hyper media, nonlinear fiction in which the reader chooses which plot elements will happen next, the ability to jump around in a text, rather than going from the beginning through the middle to the end -- all this makes the learner the center of the educational universe, Snyder said. He acknowledged that there are important roles for computers to play in education, but warned that we must not surrender all of the "blood and guts" of all the great things that happen in the classroom. He encouraged educators to "be the vanguard that keeps great stories alive."

It is concluded that literacy is both special and individual and that literacy programs should provide for both needs and interests of ALL students. It is further concluded that teachers should get to know each student, for each is, indeed, unique, though they may have some things in common. In the case of the young man, J.S., the immediate took precedence over the past, and the lively class discussions undoubtedly revealed that his concern about the Vietnam War was that of others as well.

It is further concluded that literacy-based programs recommended by some, could be more profitable and enjoyable for a number of students than the regular textbook programs, but that a great deal of thoughts would be required if such programs are to be used with ALL the children, as it has been observed again and again that different children have different learning styles in

addition to various other differences, and their needs must be provided for.

Implications

1. The diversity among students demands that teaching go beyond the usual textbook approach.
2. Teachers should be aware of the uniqueness of each student and provide for this in their teaching.
3. There are many things to be considered when designing literacy programs -- age, sex, learning style, mental and physical health, needs, interests, goals, etc.
4. Teachers should have a part in designing the programs.
5. Good parental involvement can add a great deal to literacy; it should be sought.
6. Many of the old fables, folk tales, and fine pieces of literature continue to stand the test of time, and their use, as well as the contributions of later authors should be given consideration by teachers.
7. More communication between the teachers of the elementary and secondary grades should be considered.
8. In designing programs by which ALL students would profit, much thought should be given to literacy-based programs (favored by some educators) and the usual basal text (favored by others), as there are many differences among children as to how they learn best.
9. The approach in implementing literacy programs designed to benefit ALL students should be gradual, and competent help should be readily available to teachers if the programs are

to be successful.

10. No one will deny the many, and increasing, wonders of technology, but teachers should not be "plunged" into its use without adequate training.
11. There should be continuous cooperation between the schools and teacher-training institutions.
12. Software must be selected with great care if students are to profit by it.
13. Positive attitudes, cooperation and a great deal of thought are necessary if worldwide literacy is to become a reality.

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